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Reflections on the Coinage of Seuthes III

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According to Polyaeos (7.32) there's certain "Seuthes, hyparchos of Kersebleptes" most probably Seuthes III belonging to the Odrysian dynastic family. The centre of the territories he mastered was identified by D. P. Dimitrov as the city of Seuthopolis, discovered near the Toundja River.¹ The power and potential of Seuthes as hyparchos, i.e., first in rank after the king, must have helped him retain his social status even after the march of King Philip II in Thrace (341-340 BC) - this time as a friend of Antipater, Alexander's strategos of Europe (since 334 BC). Seuthes did not take part in the anti-Macedonian uprising of Memnon² (331 BC), which was crushed by Antipater. According to Curtius Rufus (10.1.43-45) after the death of Zopyrion, strategos of Thrace in 325 BC, Seuthes headed an anti-Macedonian uprising, and officially threw off Macedonian control. After the death of Alexander III he maintained his pro-Macedonian line, protecting the interests of Macedonian rule against the centrifugal aspirations of the strategoi; Seuthes' principal enemy until his death remained Lysimachos, who has fought persistently to gain absolute power in Thrace.³

A real "Macedonian relation" existed roughly for a century by the marriage of Seuthes I with a sister of the Macedonian king Perdiccas; it could explain the preservation of the positions of Seuthes III after Philip's conquest and his indisputable taste for the

¹ ДИМИТРОВ 1957; cf. Dimitrov 1961.

² Diodoros 17. 62.4-8: [4] There was also an upheaval in Thrace at just this time which seemed to offer the Greeks an opportunity for freeing themselves. [5] Memnon, who had been designated governor-general there, had a military force and was a man of spirit. He stirred up the tribesmen, revolted against Alexander, quickly possessed a large army, and was openly bent on war. [6] Antipater was forced to mobilize his entire army and to advance through Macedonia into Thrace to settle with him. While Antipater was occupied with this, the Lacedaemonians thought that the time had come to undertake a war and issued an appeal to the Greeks to unite in defence of their freedom. [7] The Athenians had been favoured beyond all the other Greeks by Alexander and did not move. Most of the Peloponnesians, however, and some of the northern Greeks reached an agreement and signed an undertaking to go to war. According to the capacity of the individual cities they enlisted the best of their youth and enrolled as soldiers not less than twenty thousand infantry and about two thousand cavalry. [8] The Lacedaemonians had the command and led out their entire levy for the decisive battle, their king Agis having the position of commander in chief.

³ See Tatscheva 2000:325 sqq with lit.

glamour of Hellenistic culture that was perceptible even in ruins of Seuthopolis.⁴ In this connection, the assumption about the Macedonian origin of Seuthes' wife Berenike is acceptable,⁵ being most probably from Antipater's family, in my opinion. Another strong argument for this relation is the significant presence of Kassandros' coins in Seuthopolis until his death in 297 BC (see table II.) It was manifestation of the good relations established between Seuthes and Kassandros' father - Antipater.

Seuthes' coin issues known until 1984⁶ are divided into seven types which have the ruler's name on their reverse (see table 1).⁷ Their stratigraphic position in Seuthopolis cannot offer adequate minting chronology, in so far as coins of all types have been discovered to a depth of 1.20 m. In addition to the proper Seuthes' issues there are bronze coins overstruck, found both in Seuthopolis and within some hoards.

Two types of coins - 4 and 7 - are of special importance for Seuthes' mintage. They are of higher denomination, being discovered also in hoards, thus having been supposedly employed exclusively for overstriking of coin issues of Macedonian rulers and of Lysimachos. The two types are known in almost identical quantities and they represent about 2/3 of the overall Seuthes' coins (849) found in the city.

Type 4 has on the obverse head of Zeus (see table III, fig. 1), and on the reverse - a horseman moving calmly to the right. The coins from this type are the most widespread both in Seuthopolis and among the specimens in hoards.

The image of Zeus on the obverse of two other types (5-6) cannot and need not be accepted unambiguously as a Macedonian or Thracian characteristic. Recent studies enable us to assume this choice on the part of Seuthes bears diplomatic implications, representing Zeus in relation to the syncretic cult of Sabazios, which was widespread at that time in Thrace and Macedonia.⁸ Traces of this cult in Seuthopolis could be distinguished in objects like metal sculpture of a snake, as well as snake-images on an eschara, i.e. domestic altar found in the city.⁹

The mintage of type 4 can be interpreted as a reminder of the glorious past of Seuthes' ancestors, from Sparadokos to Kotys. Most probably for the time being this very type is signalling the outset of Seuthes' coinage ca. 330 BC. This assertion can be proved indirectly by the analysis¹⁰ of the honorific Athenian Decree from the summer of 330 BC referring to "Rheboulas, son of Seuthes and brother of Kotys",

⁴ Димитров 1957; cf. Dimitrov 1961.

⁵ Assumption made by Димитров 1957; see also IGBulg III/2, No 1731, pp. 146-149; Elvers 1994: 244 sqq does not rule out her possible origin from some Macedonian colony in Thrace.

⁶ The first description, as well as numismatic and historical commentary on Seuthes' and foreign coins discovered in Seuthopolis and its hinterland, was made by D. P. Dimitrov (see Dimitrov 1978, published posthumously). Some of his assertions are further developed, other underwent adequate and necessary corrections by Димитров 1984. Discussion persists down to the present day - cf. especially the important and exhaustive study of Peter 1997: 172-202, though failing to obtain autopsy on the numismatic evidence.

⁷ The numbering of the types and the numismatic data in tables I-III are after Димитров 1984: 124 sqq including tables 1-3, 8-9).

⁸ On the cult of Zeus Sabazios as Balkan-Anatolian cult, see Tacheva 1983, 162-182.

⁹ See Dimitrov 1978: fig. 57, 78; Китов 2005:80.

¹⁰ Badian 1967; Schwenk 1985.

as an Athenian citizen. It can be explained with the traditional policy to the Odrysai: to declare friendship by granting Athenian citizenship to one of the sons of the new Odrysian ruler.¹¹ The decree is a valuable evidence for the successful restoration of Seuthes' rule over part of the former Odrysian kingdom. The following events, such as launching the building programme of Seuthopolis and the possible outset of his own bronze coinage, are both adequate to his royal rank.

The eagle on the obverse of series with a small number of coins (types 2-3) is traditionally explained by the influence of Lysimachos' coinage, failing to take into account its relation both to the syncretic Zeus and to the coinage of the Odrysian king Sparadokos (ca. 464-444 BC).¹²

Type 7 (see Table III, fig. 2-3) has on its obverse Seuthes' portrait with or without diadem, i.e. a royal portrait, and on the reverse - galloping horseman identified as the ruler himself; thus bearing closest resemblance to the coin issues of Kotys I. The minting of this utterly Thracian type obviously sought to pronounce the restoration of Odrysian royal power and in the same time independence from Lysimachos gained by the king Seuthes in the war of 323-322 BC.¹³

Type 1 recently proved to be of important value. On the obverse-die there is an 8-ray star (see table III, fig. 4), whereas the reverse-die displays Zeus' thunderbolt. The 8-ray star appearing on the reverse of several types (cf. types 4-7) as additional symbol with different positions (just like the case with the thunderbolt, cf. types 3 and 5) is emblematic for Macedonian royal power and coinage at the time of Philip II and his successors. The type was considered as the earlier one since it is found only on the territory of the city and the known coin issues are relatively few with a low value of their weights. However, this fact is not sufficiently convincing and the arguments indicate rather the opposite. The coin issues would hardly have attained their political and propaganda effect sought through the outset of every royal coinage. However, the four coins of the same type found in the newly-discovered royal tomb of Seuthes III¹⁴ point towards a conclusion that type 1 has to be among the latest¹⁵ and for the time being - the closest terminus post quem for the death of Seuthes III. Another argument can be the unique coin issue of this type, found in the hoard from Mogilovo along with 103 coins of Philip II and Alexander III, as well as a "Macedonian" coin minted in 288-277 BC.¹⁶

¹¹ The relevant examples are the Athenian citizenship of Sadokos, son of Sitalkes (in 429 BC), as well as of Kersebleptes, son of Kotys; cf. also Osborne 1982.

¹² Tacheva 1992: 58 sqq.

¹³ See Diod. 18.14.2-4.

¹⁴ The coins are found in the "sarcophagus-chamber" of a monumental temple built in the "Golyamata Kosmatka" tumulus (ca. 10 kilometers away from Seuthopolis). About the identification of the tomb see Китров 2005: 67 sq.; it is based on the inscriptions on two silver vessels and on a helmet with the name of Seuthes (ΣΕΥΘΟΥ).

¹⁵ It is noteworthy to stress the fact that with Seuthes' 3 type (eagle with closed wings/thunderbolt) only three bronze coins of Kassandros (316-305 BC) in Seuthopolis have been overstruck. This rare type belongs most likely also to the latest coinage of Seuthes (cf. type 1).

¹⁶ See Dimitrov 1984: 28 sqq; 33 and Юркуова 1992: 90 about the hoards.

These observations could enable the raising of alternative chronology for the coin types of Seuthes III, as follows:

I. Outset of Seuthes' coinage - Type 4, ca. 331/330 BC

II. Restoration of the royal power of Seuthes III - Type 7, 322 BC

III. Last period of the coinage of Seuthes III - Type 1, after 304 (297?) BC.

Along with 633 Seuthes' issues of all types of his coinage, in Seuthopolis there are also discovered 206 specimens overstruck with Seuthes' dies, but only 73 are identified. Only seven bronzes of Philip and Alexander are overstruck with the type 4, as well as two of Lysimachos, whereas 64 of Kassandros, overstruck with the types 3, 4 and 7, constitute around a quarter from the total number. Along with the regular coins of the same rulers (325 pieces) the overall assemblage does not reflect the actual currency before the conquest, but the situation in the ruined Seuthopolis after it.¹⁷ If one add the sporadic manifestation of contacts with other cities and especially with Lysimacheia (1 coin) and the old outlets of Odrysian exchange as well - e.g. Apollonia Pontica (1 diobolos!),¹⁸ this reveals the indisputable economic isolation of Seuthopolis.

It is not possible to determine why and when the coins of Philip II and Alexander III are overstruck, but comparison between the coin issues and the overstruck bronzes of Kassandros' (minted 316-297 BC) with those of Lysimachos (minted 300-281 BC) is very significant: 38+64 to 5+2 ! Obviously the Kassandros' coins were overstruck with Seuthes' dies, to be legalised under the new conditions after Lysimachos was proclaimed king of Thrace (305-304 BC). His policy to exhaust the potential of Seuthes' kingdom is beyond any doubt. The apparent stagnation came probably due to the rising of the more competitive Philip's colony Kabyle with all economic advantages for the latter. At the end of his rule, Seuthes apparently relied mainly on the bronzes paid to him by his old friend Kassandros in exchange of soldiers and mercenaries.

The general tables of numismatic evidence (see Table I-II) are thought to present an idea about the potential of Seuthes III. The conclusions would have been more reliable or more categorical, if we could have now, around half a century after the coins were discovered, a new edited consistent statistical processing not only of the coin massif (especially of the overstruck) but also of the amphora tare from Seuthopolis, comparable with the already studied and interpreted assemblages in Kabyle.¹⁹

¹⁷ It is hard to find details about the fate of the isolated Seuthopolis after 281 BC, when the known *epistates* of Lysimachos and their competitors took the opportunity of the *interregnum* in these lands.

¹⁸ See Dimitrov 1984:126, tab. 8.

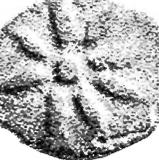
¹⁹ Seuthopolis, flooded by the waters of the "Koprinka" dam is a closed information system, which is not subject to changes through new finds, about Kabyle see Гертов 1995; Драганов 1993.

Table I The Seuthes' coinage: types, found in Seuthopolis and in the coin hoards

Found in Seuthopol.	Obverse	Reverse	Weight in grams	In the coin hoards	The overstruck coins in Seuthopolis
Type 1 68 coin issues	8-ray star	ΣΕΥΘΟΥ Thunderbolt	2.61 – 1.12	4 – from the <u>Seuthes' tomb</u> 1 – from <u>Mogilovo</u> with: 103 - Philip II and Alexander III, 1 – “Macedonian” from 288–277 BC ²⁰	Type 1
Type 2 107 coins	Eagle r., wings closed	ΣΕΥΘΟΥ within grain wreath	4.45 – 1.61		2 Type
Type 3 38 coins	Eagle r., wings closed	ΣΕΥΘΟΥ Thunderbolt	5.57 – 2.19		Type 3 3 - Kassandros (316–305)
Type 4 298 coins; 106 obverse dies	Head of Zeus r., laureate	ΣΕΥΘΟΥ Horseman in calm motion r., symbols: laurel wreath, 8-ray star, torch, or without symbols	8.98 – 1.07	- from <u>Sokolitsa 1912</u> : 17 overstruck coins of Kassandros (316–297) and 2 of Lysimachos (300 - 281) - from <u>Sokolitsa 1934</u> : 8 overstruck coins	Type 4 2 – Philip II 5 – Alexander III 48– Kassandros 311–305 2 – Kassandros 305–297 2 - Lysimachos (300–281)
Type 5 30 coins	Head of Zeus r., laureate	ΣΕΥΘΟΥ Thunderbolt, beneath 8-ray star or laurel wreath.	3.25 – 1.50		Type 5111
Type 6 22 coin issues	Head of Zeus r., laureate	ΣΕΥΘΟΥ Spearhead r., beneath 8-ray star	2.32 – 0.71		Type 6
Type 7 286 coins, 57 obv., 144 rev.	Portrait of Seuthes r., diademed/ or not	ΣΕΥΘΟΥ Seuthes as horseman galloping r., beneath: laurel wreath, 8-ray star, or without symbols	7.33 – 3.01	4 – from <u>Seuthopolis tomb</u> with 1 drachma of Alexander III	Type 7 2 – Kassandros 316–305 10 – Kassandros 305–297

²⁰ See Dimitrov 1984:28 sqq; 33 and Юркова 1992: 90 about the hoards.

Rulers	Silver coins	Bronze coins		
		Non-overstruck bronze coins	Identified overstruck coins	
Philip II	4 – tetradrachms	Total 134: 87 from the tombs, 47 from the city	2 with type 4	total 4
Alexander III	4 – tetradrachms	Total 73: 44 from the tombs, 29 from the city	5 with type 4	total 10
Kassandros (311–305 BC)		31 coins	48 with type 4; 3 with type 3; 1 with type 7.	total 54
Kassandros (305–298 BC)		24 coins	2 with type 4; 10 with type 7.	total 12
Lysimachos (305–281 BC)	2 – tetradrachms	41 coins	2 with type 4	total 3
Seleukos I (323–281 BC)	1 – tetradrachm		Non identified →	total 123
Antiochos II (280–261 BC)		1 coin		
Demetrios I (306–283 BC)		6 coins		
Spartokos (ca 280 –?)		1 coin		
Adaios (before 252 BC)		14 coins		
		Total:325 regular royal coins	Total 73 overstruck: 59 with type 4, 11 with type 7, 3 with type 3.	Total 206 overstruck

				
Fig. 1: Head of Zeus, obverse die of type 4	Fig. 2 : Head of Seuthes, obverse die of type 7	Fig. 3: Seuthes as galloping horseman, reverse die of type 7	Fig. 4: 8-ray star, obverse die of type 1	Fig. 5: Eagle with closed wings, obverse die of type 5
diam 20 mm	diam 20 mm	diam 20 mm	diam 12 mm	diam 16/17 mm

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